

10 Mars 1783

On this day in history, March 10, 1783, the last naval battle of the American Revolution is fought off Cape Canaveral, Florida, as Captains John Barry and John Green try to deliver a shipload of Spanish silver to the Continental Congress. John Barry, captain of the USS Alliance, arrived in Martinique from France in January, 1783. There he found orders from Robert Morris of the Continental Congress to sail to Havana, Cuba to pick up 72,000 Spanish silver dollars that were to be used to finance the Continental Army.

When Barry arrived in Havana, he discovered that Captain John Green, aboard the USS Duc de Lauzun, was already there with the same orders from Morris. The silver was already loaded on Green's ship so the captains decided to sail together in case they encountered any enemies along the way. The ships left Havana on March 6 and sailed part way with a Spanish and French fleet that was making its way to Jamaica.

On the 7th, the Americans left the fleet and headed north, but ran into two British ships, the HMS Alarm and the HMS Sybil. Barry and Green headed back toward the Spanish and French fleet and as soon as the British ships saw the fleet they sailed off. On the 8th, Barry and Green sailed to the north again and reached Florida, with Barry constantly slowing his ship because the Duc de Lauzun was much slower. On the 9th, the two agreed to transfer much of the money to the Alliance because the Duc de Lauzun's slow speed made it vulnerable to the British ships patrolling the area.

On the 10th, the Alarm, the Sybil and a third British ship, the Tobago, found the American ships off the coast of Cape Canaveral. As the British gave chase, as usual, the Duc de Lauzun dragged behind. Captain Barry pulled alongside Green and persuaded him to throw most of the ship's cannons overboard to lighten the load. A fourth ship of unknown origin appeared on the horizon, which caused the British ships to hold back, making Barry think it must be French or Spanish. Barry then maneuvered between the Duc de Lauzun and the Sybil, which began firing.

The Alliance took several direct hits, including one in the captain's quarters which killed one and wounded several others. Barry commanded his men not to fire, but sailed directly for the Sybil. When they were in extremely close range, he ordered the men to fire and they unleashed a torrent of cannonfire on the Sybil. After a firefight of 40 minutes, the Sybil fell quiet and began to sail off. Nearly 40 had been killed on the ship and another 40 wounded.

The Alliance, the Duc de Lauzun and the ship from the horizon, which turned out to be the French ship Triton, chased the British ships, but lost them in the night. The rest of the silver was transferred to the faster Alliance and the ships headed north. The Duc de Lauzun was able to travel up the Delaware to Philadelphia on the 18th and the Alliance made it to Newport, Rhode Island on the 20th. Only a few days later, word arrived that the Treaty of Paris had been signed on February 3, bringing the Revolution to a close and making this engagement the last naval battle of the Revolution.

